

ABSTRACT

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An electronic media distribution/play system includes a service facility that has a communications network interface and maintains a data file catalog. The catalog is sent over the network to requesting users, and the system processes payments from customers in establishing file access authorizations. Encrypted user-selected files and a player program are transmitted to each customer for metered access to received data files as limited by the authorization, and customers can make additional selections and play the encrypted files freely while the authorization remains established. The system can transmit the data files from local storage, and also provide links to encrypted files that are stored at remote vendor facilities. Authorizations can be for selected portions or class levels of the catalog, and for terms measured as calendar time, play time, and collective number of plays. Also disclosed is a method for facilitating the distribution and accessing of electronic files.